



2024 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study Auburn University

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Focus of Case Study

Auburn University's Waste Reduction and Recycling Department focused on assessing contamination rates in the residence halls, implementing changes, and conducting a competition to improve recycling behaviors and raise awareness.

Detailed description of campaign or effort

In January 2024, Auburn University's Waste Reduction and Recycling Department initiated a project to assess contamination rates in the waste and recycling streams from campus residence halls. The objective was to identify contamination rates and implement campus-wide changes for improvement, informed by insights from the competition. Modeled after the successful Beat Bama Food Drive, the project aimed to leverage the Auburn vs. Alabama rivalry, to inspire behavior change. The timeline aligned with the Campus Race to Zero Waste competition.

Digital Marketing

A pre-season flyer was sent to the residence hall Resident Assistants (RAs) who distributed the flyer to student chat groups.

Housing Contamination Audits

Data collection began in January at 10 waste and recycling collection sites at residence halls to establish baseline contamination rates. Audits occurred on Monday mornings, weather and staff permitting, to review accumulated waste from the weekend. Data included contamination percentage, fill percentage, contaminating items, and notes on collection site conditions.

Changing Signage

In February, signage conditions for recycling bins [mixed paper, plastics / aluminum / steel, cardboard], and trash receptacles were assessed. By month-end, new and colorful, picture-based stickers replaced old, illegible signage on recycling bins.

Distribution of Competition Results

During the competition, weekly scoresheets were distributed to the RAs of each residence hall on campus. It was the responsibility of the RAs to share this information with the residence hall's specific group chat.

Concurrent Efforts

In March, a group from the SUST 5000 Sustainability Capstone class conducted a residence hall waste audit for their class project. They created and shared educational posts on TikTok (@autrashtok) and Instagram (@autrashaudit2024).

Planning steps and timeline to implement

- Early January
 - Selected residence hall pickup locations and organized methods for reporting data
 - Created a scoresheet with formulas for contamination rate analysis
 - Scheduled audits for Monday mornings to maximize material analysis
 - Reached out to University of Alabama to inquire about participation
- Late January
 - Created a Box folder to organize competition records and related materials
 - Developed and shared weekly scoresheets for each residence hall and pre-season graphic with the Facilities Management Marketing Department for approval
 - Conducted a trial run of the Housing Contamination Audit (January 22)
 - Conducted the first official Housing Contamination Audit (January 29)
- February
 - Conducted Housing Contamination Audits
 - Photographed bin signage at each location
 - Replaced old, illegible signage with new and colorful, picture-based stickers by the end of the month
- March
 - Conducted Housing Contamination Audits
 - SUST 5000 Sustainability Capstone class conducted their waste audit on March 11
- Early April
 - Conducted Housing Contamination Audits
- Late April
 - Conducted Housing Contamination Audit on April 23 (MAKEUP WEEK 4 of Competition)

Resources and stakeholders involved

Budget

- Sticker replacement for 25 recycling bins, \$87 (each bin has two stickers)

Stakeholders and support

- Auburn University Residence Life
 - Lexy Payne, Assistant Director, Residence Life
- Auburn University Waste Reduction and Recycling Department

- Conducted and documented Housing Contamination Audits
 - Provided and installed new stickers for the bins along with the tools and labor to remove the old stickers
- Auburn University Facilities Management Marketing Department
 - Reviewed and edited the pre-season graphic and the weekly scoresheets
- SUST 5000 Sustainability Capstone class
 - Dr. Miriam Wyman, Lecturer, Academic Sustainability Program
 - Waste Audit Group Members
 - Aaron Figa, Lily Hardcastle, Nathan Marks, Will Springer, Sarah Willis
 - TikTok and Instagram posts created and shared
- Office of Sustainability, assisted with waste audit

Describe the results of this campaign component

General Results

- Student knowledge about recycling remained relatively consistent throughout the campaign
- The contamination reduction project was supported by Residence Life and the RAs
- RAs were aware of the challenge
- Audits revealed that students often throw recyclable materials into recycling bins, regardless of which recycling bin it is
- The campaign made residents aware of the impact of their recycling habits
- Gained insight into student misconceptions about recycling
- Auburn lost the competition to the University of Alabama

Specific measurable impact

- Over the course of the campaign, contamination dropped by 6% overall
- Mixed paper recycling contamination decreased by 8%
- Plastics / aluminum / steel recycling contamination decreased by 14%
- Cardboard recycling contamination increased by 3%
- Recyclables in the trash decreased by 7%

What would you do differently in the future?

- Determine how to better engage the University of Alabama
- Set up consistent scoring methods between universities
- Improve math formulas for scoring
- Increase engagement with the student body
- Consider a targeted ad campaign for more effective communication
- Design the competition as a semester-long event to maintain focus

What advice would you give to another college that wanted to do a similar effort?

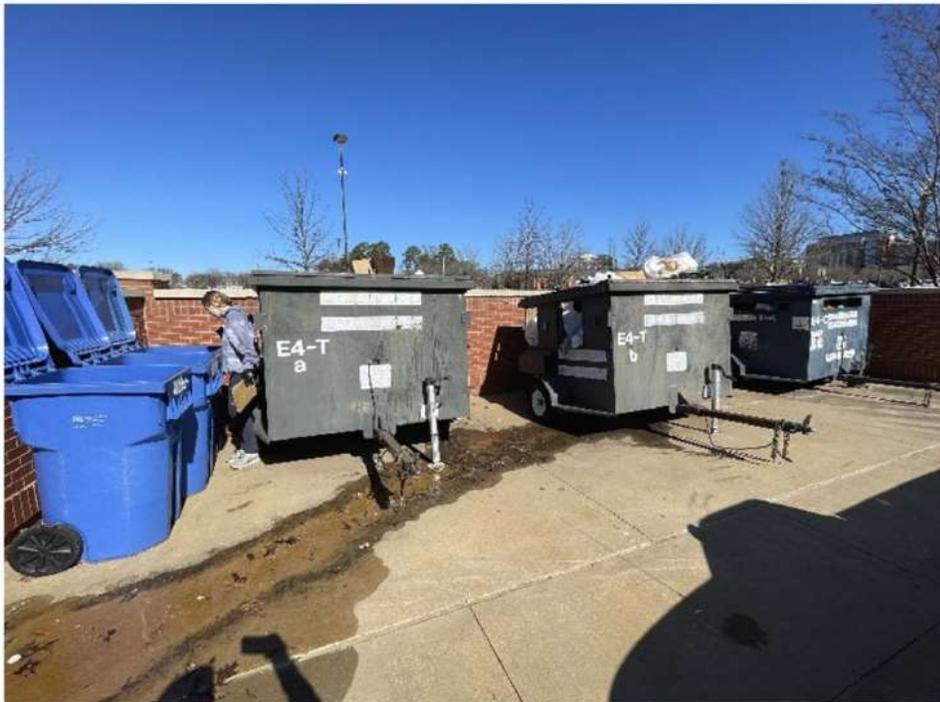
- Standardize scoring methods between universities
- Ensure consistent and clear communication strategies
- Create hype and excitement with students
- Plan early and allocate resources efficiently

Photos and Graphics

courtesy of Waste Reduction and Recycling unless otherwise noted



Conducting a Housing Contamination Audit



Residence Hall waste and recycling collection site



Bin Type, Bottle and Can (plastics / aluminum / steel) Recycling Bin



Bin Type, Mixed Paper Recycling Bin



Bin Type, Cardboard Recycling



Bin Type, Trash

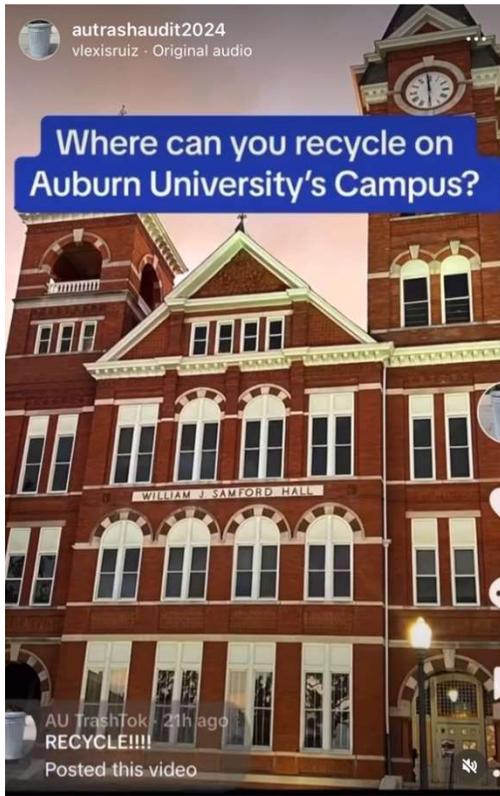
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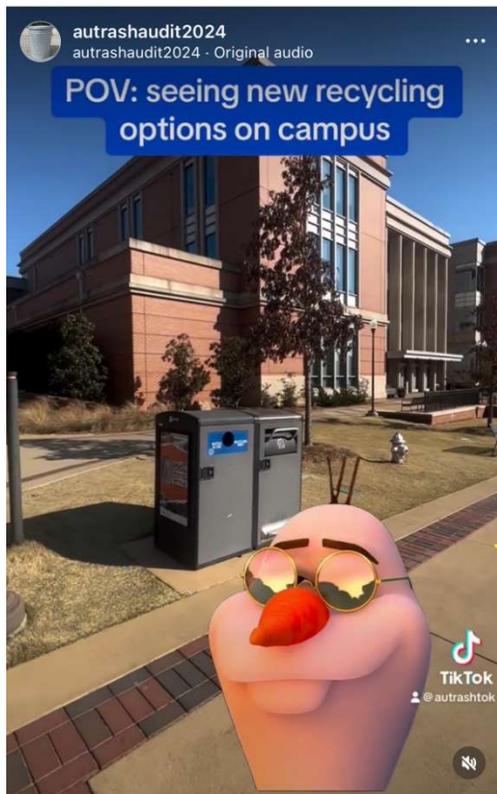
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Replaced old, illegible signage with new and colorful, picture-based stickers



TikTok (@autrashtok) and Instagram (@autrashaudit2024) posts



TikTok (@autrashtok) and Instagram (@autrashaudit2024) posts



au_recycles
Cater Lawn



Instagram post (@au_recycles)



au_recycles
Cater Lawn



Instagram post (@au_recycles)

BEAT BAMA

GET TO ZERO

Lower our recycling contamination rates.

Use tote to collect recyclables and sort at the carts.

March 18 - April 12



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Pre-Season Graphic (developed in conjunction with Facilities Management Marketing Department)

BEAT BAMA

GET TO ZERO

OAK WEEK #4

Average Recycling Contamination Rate



Oak, your contamination rate has INCREASED since last week. Be sure to sort carefully.

RESIDENCE HALL RANKS

Contamination Rate

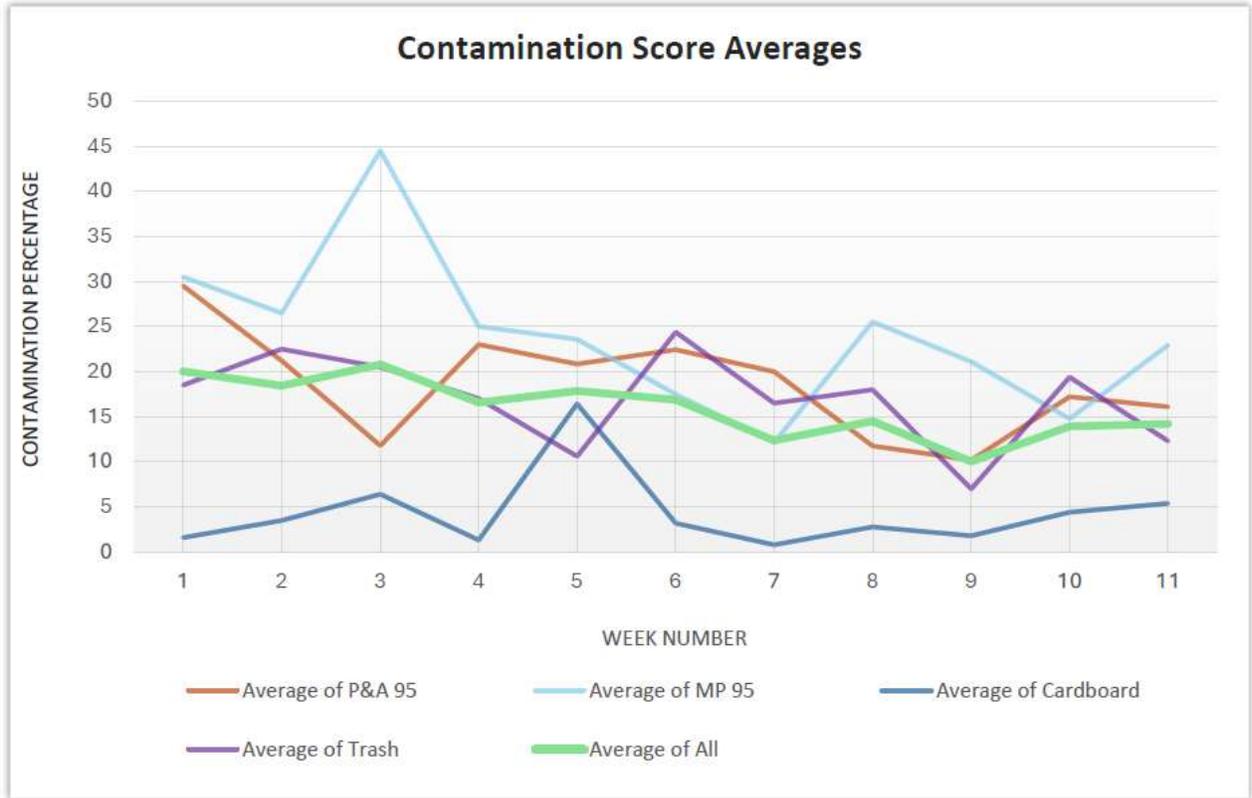
1. Upper Quad	28%
2. Lower Quad	32%
3. Holloway & Talon	36%
4. Matthews & Aubie	37%
5. Plainsman & Leischuck	39%
6. Oak	40%
7. Magnolia	45%
8. Sasnett	45%
9. South Donahue	49%
10. Boyd	59%

OVERALL CONTAMINATION RATES

Auburn University	41	Oh no, we are losing to Bama this week. Let's bring our contamination rates down next week!
University of Alabama	9	

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Weekly Scoresheet (developed in conjunction with Facilities Management Marketing Department)



Contamination Score Averages



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